

Orkney Marine Planning Advisory Group – Meeting 8

OMPAG: AG6 Minutes: 12th February 2026: 10:00 – 11:00

Present: Kristopher Leask (Chair) (KL); James Green (JG); Daniel Morris (DM); Mellissa Thomson (MT); Emily Murphy Gray (EMG); Dan Brazier (DB); Nigel Welford (NW); Phil Bennett (PB); Peter Watson (PW); Janet Davies (JD); Sandy Kerr (SK); Victoria Clements (VC); Eva Dowding (ED); Ben Miller (BM); Jo Porter (JP); Craig Smith (CS), Alex Foulkes (AF).

1. **Apologies:** David Thomson (DT); Owen Tierney (OT); Jenni Kakkonen (JK); David Dawson (DD); David Sawkins (DS); Brian Kynoch (BK); Cheryl Chapman (CC).
2. **Minutes**
3. **Introductions**

KL (Chair) welcomed everybody to the meeting.

4. **The adoption of the Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan and onwards implementation**

JG - OIRMP has been approved by Scottish Ministers and will be published on the 19 February.

OIC Marine Planning will be meeting with the Scottish Government in March to discuss how the marine plan will be implemented.

JG highlighted the opportunity for OMPAG members to provide initial feedback to inform these discussions.

JG outlined the basic principles that underpin the implementation of the plan. The plan contains policies to guide decisions by consenting authorities and planners on proposed development and activities in Orkney. Public authorities are legally required to take authorisation or enforcement decisions in accordance with the appropriate marine plans. The appropriate marine plans are the national marine plan, and for decisions that relate to a Scottish marine region, like Orkney, any regional marine plan which is in effect for that region. Fundamentally, the Plan policies help decision makers to contribute towards the Plan objectives. It is for the relevant public authority decision maker to determine which policies, or component of a policy, are relevant to a specific decision and what weight to attach to policies on a case-by-case basis.

Proportionate implementation of the plan policies by decision makers is a key principle that underpins the plan. So, what does proportionate mean in practice? Decision makers need to consider whether the type, location and scale of a proposed development, and its impacts or effects, justify the application of a specific policy or a provision within a policy.

The Plan policies aim to maximise positive impacts from development and appropriately manage adverse impacts. An overarching aim of the Plan's policies is to, in order of preference, avoid, minimise and/or appropriately mitigate any significant

adverse impacts that could be caused by a proposed development. In addition to supporting the identification of appropriate mitigation measures, the Plan policies aim to support the delivery of environmental, social and economic benefits, enhancement and positive effects for biodiversity.

In accordance with the provisions of the Marine Licensing (Consultees) (Scotland) Order 2011, Orkney Islands Council, as the delegate, must be consulted in relation to any application for a marine licence for an activity which is to be carried out wholly or partly within the Orkney Islands marine region. This consultation process provides an opportunity for Orkney Islands Council to provide advice on Plan implementation.

Discussion:

PB – Danny attended the ORIFG meeting last week. It was noted that many fishers were not aware of the Plan. It was helpful that DM was able to explain what the Plan covers and how it applies.

SK – Is there is a review process built into the Plan.

JG –There is a statutory requirement to review the Plan every five years.

NW – Attended the Shetland Islands Marine Planning Group and asked if the Orkney RMP will follow a collaborative approach going forward within the monitoring and review process.

JG – The Plan is formally a Scottish Government plan. Implementation, monitoring and review will therefore be undertaken jointly, with close working arrangements with the Scottish Government moving forward. We will seek input from the OMPAG as the monitoring and evaluation framework develops. We are conscious that members may have limited capacity to provide detailed input on technical documents like these and we don't want to overly burden members. It would be helpful to receive feedback on the level of input OMPAG members would like to provide. It would also be helpful to get OMPAG input to identify relevant indicators, for example.

5. Prioritising the preparation of supporting guidance for the plan

JG – A questionnaire has been circulated to members regarding the supporting guidance to the OIRMP. The purpose of the questionnaire is to identify which guidance documents the Advisory Group considers to be priorities and to ask for any initial feedback to inform preparation of guidance.

BM – There does not appear to be specific guidance relating to renewable energy and asked whether this would be addressed.

JG – The Plan contains a suite of policies across a range of sectors, including renewables, and it was determined that additional guidance for Sector Policy 5 (Offshore wind, wave and tidal renewable energy generation) was not required at this stage. However, Marine Enhancement guidance, along with Sustainable Social and Economic Benefits and Amenity and Wellbeing guidance, would be applicable to renewables, for example.

JP – It is good to see the spatial guidance for aquaculture. Similar spatial guidance could be useful for other sectors including fisheries, particularly inshore fisheries.

JG – Fisheries management is outside the scope of the Regional Marine Plan. The Plan considers how fishing may be impacted by other development or activities including impacts on nursery and spawning grounds. There is an opportunity to provide supporting data to inform the implementation of the plan's Commercial Fishing policy, and this is recognised as a current data gap that we have discussed with the local fishing industry.

PB – Work has been ongoing to explore regional fisheries management options, as the current structure is considered not fit for purpose. Discussions have included Regulation Orders and a meeting with Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority representatives. The Scottish Government is progressing the Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement programme, expected to be published in the first quarter of 2026. Regional management discussions may need to pause during this period pending clarity from the Scottish Government. Additionally, vessels under 10m may have trackers installed in the near future.

NW – Aquaculture development is currently exempt from the NPF4 marine enhancement and natural capital policies 3b and 3c. However, Scottish Government is planning interim guidance for aquaculture – is this something that OIC Marine Planning have been involved in?

JG – Marine Planning has not been involved in those discussions. Marine Enhancement is an ongoing conversation with relevant sectors. OIC Marine Planning is keen to work in partnership to deliver measures that deliver best practice in Orkney. Given the current lack of clarity on how enhancement can be delivered, members were asked whether this is an area OMPAG would wish to prioritise.

SK – It is important to ensure a robust scientific foundation and evidence base within marine enhancement projects.

NW – Some companies have proposed marine enhancement measures which have subsequently been refused by regulators, this highlights the need for a solid evidence base and further guidance.

JD – The Scottish Government has put forward legislation to extend SEPA’s authority out to 12 nautical miles (nm) and asked whether this would impact the Finfish Farming Spatial Guidance (FFSG).

JG – This should not affect the plan or FFSG which have jurisdiction to 12 nm. JG confirmed that Environmental Authorisation (Scotland) Regulations 2018 (EASR) are appropriately referenced within the Plan.

KL – Reviewing the list of topics, Marine Enhancement, Amenity, and Socioeconomics could be considered as potential priorities.

DM will resend the questionnaire link to members.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan

DM delivered a presentation outlining what the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework will cover, the process through which it will be developed, and how OMPAG members can be involved in the process. DM highlighted that this is an important next step to allow us to determine the impact and effectiveness of the OIRMP, including how the policies are being implemented and whether the Plan is achieving its objectives. It is currently at an early stage of development, and OMPAG members will be contacted when relevant for input. Indicators for each objective of the OIRMP are important to identify at this stage.

NW – Is it the main function of OMPAG on this to identify/input to these potential indicators?

DM – Identifying indicators is currently a key priority and OMPAG members will be asked to provide advice on this, and there will be further opportunities for feedback as the work develops.

NW – SIMPAG has established subgroups that meet several times a year to focus on specific topics and NW suggested this as a possible model.

DM – The Scottish Government regional planning team are making their way to Orkney in March to discuss how they wish this work to be taken forward and provide direction on the specific approach.

JG – There was an OMPAG subgroup established that supported the development of the FFSG. There is the option for subgroups to be established to inform the preparation of

the other the guidance documents and potentially for the monitoring and evaluation framework, with consultation taking place on draft guidance when they are ready. We are aware that OMPAG members may have limited capacity to engage fully in subgroups so we are happy to receive input in a way that works for individual OMPAG members.

DB – The cumulative impact study currently being undertaken by NatureScot could provide a useful baseline for the monitoring indicators.

SK – Interested in being involved, particularly in relation to socio-economic guidance and indicators. Indicators such as Gross Value Added (GVA) can be crude and do not necessarily provide useful indicators of local economic benefit.

DM – The intention is to initially gather a broad range of potential indicators and then refine them to identify those that are most suitable to use.

JG – It would be beneficial to benefit from Heriot-Watt/SK's expertise in economic matters and stresses that there is need for specialist input to ensure datasets used are robust.

KL – Also expressed an interest in being involved in this and agrees with the importance of ensuring monitoring and evaluation indicators are robust.

SK – Emphasises the importance of public outreach. The right people need to be involved and engaged with during this process. Local participation should be increased to capture community views.

JG – Engagement should and will be a continual process, the engagement with fishers (RIFG) mentioned by PB previously is an example of this. We are aware that certain indicators, for example those relating to quality of life and wellbeing can only be captured through a process of community/stakeholder engagement.

JP – The previous consultation events held as part of the OIRMP preparation process in 2024 were very effective in engaging local stakeholders.

DB – Suggests that a gap analysis could be undertaken to assess what data is currently available to support agreed indicators. The analysis could then be used to prioritise further research work in Orkney. The analysis could help distinguish between 'nice to have' and 'must have' monitoring and evaluation indicators.

7. AOB, questions and close

Meeting close at 10:56.